

# The Million Dollar Mystery

By HAROLD MAC GRATH

A Novel Drama in the Photo Drama of the Same Name by the Theatrical Film Company

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### Setting Traps for Norton.

The black hunter possessed three separate search chambers, always in preparation. Hence, when the one in use was turned down they transferred their endeavor to the second until all chances appeared identical to the value as the first. As Norton, the organizer owned considerable wealth, and they found the evidence in which they had their search chambers, tested them for a number of years, and refurnished them carefully with trap doors, doors and panels and all that apparatus so necessary to men who are sometimes compelled to make a quick getaway.

When the Atlantic City attempt was turned into a chase by Norton's timely arrival Braine determined once more to risk himself in this meddling reporter. He knew too much, in the first place, and in the second place Braine wanted to learn whether the reporter bore a charmed life or was just ordinarily lucky. He would attempt nothing delicate, requiring finesse. He would simply waylay Norton and make a commonplace end of him. He would disappear, this reporter, that would be all; and when they found him he might or might not be recognizable.

So Braine called a conference and he and his fellow rogues went over a number of expedients and finally agreed that the best thing to do would be to send a man to the newspaper, ostensibly as a reporter looking for a situation. With this excuse he would be able to hang around the city room for three or four days. The idea back of this was to waylay Norton on his way to some salient point which took him to the suburbs.

All this was arranged down to the smallest detail; and a man whom they were quite certain Norton had not yet seen was selected to play the part. He had been a reporter once, sure's the pit; so there was no doubt of his being able to handle his end of the game.

"I want Norton, I want him badly," declared Braine, "and we go to you if you let house play in between you and the object of this move."

The man selected to act the reporter hung his head. Why? He had been the origin of his fall from honest living, and he was not so calloused as not to feel the sting of remorse at times.

"More," went on Braine, "I want Norton brought to 49. It's a little off the beat, and we can handle Norton as we please. When we get rid of this newspaper ferret there'll be another to eliminate. But let's a fox, and a fox must be set to trail him."

"And who is that?"

"Jones, Jones, Jones!" thundered Braine. "He's the live wire. But the reporter first. Jones depends a lot on him. Take away this prop and Jones will not be so sure of himself. There's a man outside all this circle, and all these weeks of warfare have not served to bring him into the circle."

"Hargrave is dead," said Vroom stolidly.

"As dead as I am," snarled Braine. "Two men went away in that balloon; and I'll wager my head that one man came back. I am beginning to put a few things together that I have not thought of before. Who knows? That balloon may have been carried out to sea purposely. The captain on that tramp steamer may have lied from beginning to end. I tell you, Hargrave is alive and wherever he is he has his hand on all the wires. He has agents, too, whom we know nothing about. Hang the million! I want to put my hands on Hargrave just to prove that I am the better man. He communicates with Jones, perhaps through the reporter; he has had me followed; it was he who changed the boxes, bored the hole in the ceiling of the other quarters and let me know what."

"If that's the case," said Vroom, "why hasn't he had us apprehended?"

Braine laughed heartily. "Haven't you been able to see by this time what his game is? Revenge. He does not want the police to meddle only in the smaller affairs. He wants to put terror into the hearts of all of us. Keep this point in your mind when you act. He'll never summon the police unless we make a broad daylight attempt to get possession of his daughter. And even then he would make it out a plain case of kidnapping. Elimination, that's the word. All right. We'll play at that game ourselves. No. I shall be Mr. Norton. And if you fail I'll break you," Braine added to the reporter.

"I'll get him," said the man sulkily. Later, when he applied for a situation on the Blade, it happened that there were two strikes on hand, and two or three extra men were needed on the city staff. The man from the Black Hundred was given a temporary job and went by the name of Gregg.

For three days he worked faithfully, submitting from his favorite tittle. He had never worked in New York, so his record was unknown. He had told the city editor that he had worked on a Chicago paper, now defunct.



Florence Falls into a Bed of Quicksand.

He paid no attention whatsoever to Norton, a sign of no little scorn. On the other hand Norton never went forth on an assignment that Gregg did not know exactly where he was going. But all these stories kept Norton in town; and it would be plausible, or too risky to attempt to handle him anywhere but inside of town. So Gregg had to abide his time.

It came soon enough. Norton was idling at his desk when the city editor called him up to the wicket.

"General Henderson has just returned to America. Get his opinion on the latest Balkan rumormongers. He's out at his suburban home. Here's the address."

"How long will you hold open for me?" asked Norton, meaning how long would the city editor wait for the story.

"Till one-thirty. You ought to be back by midnight. It's only eight now."

"All right," Henderson's approachable. I may get a good story out of him."

"Maybe," thought Gregg, who had lost nothing of this conversation. It was his opportunity. He immediately left the zone of the city desk for a telephone booth. But as he passed the door of the city editor's room he did not note the look



Norton Was at His Desk.

scribing of a smooth faced, gray haired man who stood at the side of Norton's desk awaiting the reporter's return. "Why, Jones," cried the surprised Norton. "What are you doing all this way from home?"

"Orders," said Jones, smiling faintly as he delivered a note to the reporter.

"Anything serious?"

"Not that I am aware of. Miss Florence was rather particular. She wanted to be sure that the note reached your hands safely."

"And you mean to say that you came away and left her alone in that house?"

Again Jones smiled. "I left her well guarded, you may be sure of that. She will never run away again." He waited for Norton to read the note.

It was nothing more than one of those love orders to come and call at once. And who had made Jones venture into town with it? The reporter smiled and put the note away tenderly. And then he caught Jones smiling, too.

"I'm going to marry her, Jones."

"That remains to be seen," replied the butler, not unkindly.

"Well, anyhow, thanks for bringing the note. But I've got to disappoint her tonight. I'm off in a jiffy of a

hurry to interview General Henderson. I'll be out to see tomorrow. You can find your way out of this old brick trap, Jones."

The moment he turned away the smile faded from Jones' face, and with the quickness and politeness of a cat he reached the side of the booth in which Gregg believed himself so secure from eavesdropping. The half dozen words Jones heard convinced him that Norton was again the object of the Black Hundred's attention. He had seen the man's face that memorable night when the balloon escaped for its passenger. Before Gregg came out of the booth Jones decided to overtake him and forewarn him, but unfortunately the reporter was nowhere in sight.

There was left for Jones nothing else but to return home or follow when he came out. As this might be known to Florence to be exceptionally well guarded, both within and without the house, he decided to wait and follow the spy.

When Braine received the message he was pleased. Norton's assignment fitted his purpose like a glove. Before midnight he would have Mr. Meddling Reporter where he would bother no one for some time—if he proved tractable. If not, he would never bother any one again. Braine gave his orders tersely. Unless Norton met with unforeseen delay, nothing could prevent his capture.

When Norton arrived at the Henderson place, a footman informed him from the veranda that General Henderson was at 49 Elm street for the evening, and he would be wise to call there. Jim nodded his thanks and set off in haste for 49 Elm street. The footman did not enter the house, but hurried down the steps and slunk off among the adjacent shrubbery. His mission was over with.

The house in Elm street was Braine's suburban establishment. He went there occasionally to hibernate, as it were, to grow a new skin when close pressed. The caretaker was a man rightly called Samson. He was a brute of the bouncer type.

It was fast work for Braine to get out there. If the man disguised as a footman played his cards badly Braine would have all his trouble for nothing. He disguised himself with that infernal cleverness which had long since made him a terror to the police, who were looking for ten different men instead of one. He knew that Norton would understand instantly that he was not the general; but on the other hand he would not know that he was addressing Braine.

So the arch-conspirator waited; and so Norton arrived and was ushered into the room. A single glance was enough to satisfy the reporter, always keen eyed and observant.

"I wish to see General Henderson," he said politely.

"General Henderson is doubtless at his own house."

"Ah!"

"Don't be alarmed—yet," said Braine smoothly.

"I am not alarmed," replied Norton. "I am only chagrined. Since General Henderson is not to be found here I must be excused."

"I will excuse you presently."

"Ah! I begin to see."

"Indeed!" mocked Braine.

"I have tumbled or walked into a trap."

"A keen mind like yours must have recognized that fact the moment you discovered I was not the general."

"I am indebted to the Black Hundred," cooed.

"Precisely. We do not wish you ill, Mr. Norton."

"To be sure, not!" ironically. "What with falling safes, poisoned cigarettes, and so forth, I can readily see that you have my welfare at heart. What puzzled me was the suddenness with which these affectionate signs ceased."

"You're a man of heart," said Braine with genuine admiration. "These affectionate signs, as you call them, ceased because for the time being you ceased to be a menace. You have become that once more, and here you are!"

"And what are you going to do with me now that you have got me?"

"There will be two courses," Braine reached into a drawer and drew out a thick roll of bills. "There are here something like \$5,000."

"Quite a tidy sum; enough for a chap to get married on."

The two eyed each other steadily. And in his heart Braine sighed. For he saw in this young man's eyes incorruptibility.

"It is yours on one condition," said Braine, reaching out his foot stealthily toward the button which would summon Samson.

"And that is," interpolated Norton, "that I join the Black Hundred."

"Or the great beyond, my lad," took up Braine, his voice crisp and cold.

Norton could not repress a shiver. Where had he heard this voice before?

Braine! He stifled.

"Murder in cold blood!" he managed to say.

"Indefinite imprisonment. Choose."

"I have chosen."

"H'm!" Braine rose and went over to the side-board for the brandy. "I'm going to offer you a drink to show you that personally there are no hard feelings. You are in the way. After you, our friend, Jones. This brandy is not poisoned, neither are the glasses. Choose either and I'll drink first. We are all desperate men, Norton; and we stop at nothing. Your life hangs by a hair. Do you know where Hargrave is?"

Norton eyed his liquor thoughtfully.

"Do you know where the money is?"

"Norton smelt of the brandy."

"I am sorry," said Braine. "I should have liked to win over a head like yours."

Norton nonchalantly took out his watch, and that bit of bravado perhaps saved his life. In the case of his watch he saw a brutal face behind him. Without a tremor, Norton took

up his glass.

"I am sorry to disappoint you," he said, "but I shall neither join you nor go to by-by."

Quick as a bird shadow above grass, he flung the brandy over his shoulder into the face of the man behind. Samson yulled with pain. Almost at the same instant Norton pushed over the table, upsetting Braine with it. Next he dashed through the curtains, slammed the door, and fled to the street, very shaky about the knees, if the truth is to be told.

General Henderson's views upon the latest Balkan rumormongers were missing from the Blade the following morning. Norton, instead of returning to the general's and fulfilling his assignment like a faithful reporter, hurried out to Riverside to acquaint Jones with what had happened. Jones was glad to see him safe and sound.

"That word reporter started the game," he said. "I overheard a word or two while he was talking in the booth. All your telephone booths are ramshackle affairs, you use them so constantly. I tried to find you, but you were out of sight. Now, tell me what happened."

"Sh!" warned Norton as he spied Florence coming down the stairs.

"I thought you couldn't come!" she cried. "But ten o'clock!"

"I checked my mind," he replied, laughing.

He caught her arm in his and drew her toward the library. Jones smiled after them with that enigmatical smile of his, which might have signified irony or affection. After half an hour's chat, Florence, quite aware that the two men wished to talk, retired.

At the door Norton told Jones what had taken place at 49 Elm street.

"Ah! we must not forget that number," mused Jones. "My advice is, keep an eye on this Gregg chap. We may get somewhere by watching him."

"Do you know where Hargrave is?"

Jones scratched his chin reflectively.

Norton augured, "I can't get anything out of you."

"Much less any one else. I'm growing fond of you, my boy. You're a man."

"Thanks; and good-night."

When Olga Perloff called the next day Jones divested himself of his livery, donned a plain coat and hat, and left the house stealthily. Today he was determined to learn something definite in regard to this suave, handsome Russian. When she left the house Jones rose from his hiding place and proceeded to follow her. The result of this espionage on the part of Jones will be seen presently.

Meantime Jim went down to the office and lied cheerfully about his missing the general. Whether the city editor believed him or not is of no matter. Jim went over to his desk. From the corner of his eye he could see Gregg scribbling away. He never raised his head as Jim sat down to read his mail. After awhile Gregg rose and left the office; and, of course, Jim left shortly afterward. When the newcomer saw that he was being followed, he smiled and continued on his way. This Norton chap was suspicious. All the better; his suspicions should be made the hook to land him with. By and by the man turned into a drug store and Jim loitered about till he recognized Gregg. Gregg walked with brisker steps now. It was his intention to lead Norton on a wild goose chase for an hour or so, long enough to give Braine time to arrange a welcome at another house.

Norton kept perhaps half a block in the rear of his man all the while. But for this caution he would have witnessed a little pantomime that would have put him wholly upon his guard. Turning a corner, Gregg all but bumped into the countess. He was quick enough to place a finger on his lips and motion his head toward a taxicab. Olga hadn't the least idea who was coming around the corner, but she halted the cab and was off in it before Jim swung around the corner.

Jones, who had followed the countess for something over an hour and a half, hugged a doorway. What now? He wondered. The countess knew the man. That was evidence enough for the astute butler. But what meant the pantomime and the subsequent hurry? He soon learned. The man Gregg went his way, and then Jim turned the corner. Jones cast a wistful glance at the vanishing cab of the Russian, and decided to shadow the shadower—in other words, follow the reporter, to see that nothing serious befell him.

The lurer finally paused at a door, opened it with a key, and swung it behind him, very careful, however, not to spring the latch. Naturally Jim was mightily pleased when he found the door could be opened. When Jones, not far behind, saw him open the door, he started to call out a warning, but thought the better of it. If Norton was walking into a trap it was far better that he, Jones, should remain outside of it. If Jim did not appear after a certain length of time, he would start an investigation on his own account.

No sooner was Jim in the hallway than he was set upon and overpowered. They had in this house what was known as "the punishment room." Here traitors paid the reckoning, and were never more heard of. Into this room Jim was unconsciously dropped when Braine found that he could get no information from the reporter.

The room did not look sinister, but for all that it possessed the faculty of growing smaller and smaller, slowly or swiftly, as the man above at the lever willed. When Jim was apprised of this fact, he ran madly about in search of some mode of escape, knowing full well in his heart that he should not find one.

Presently the machinery began to work and Norton's business grew dry

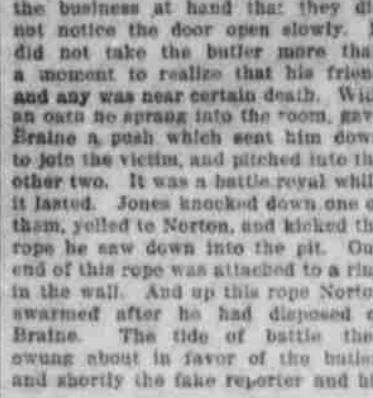


In the Case of His Watch He Saw a Brutal Face Behind Him.

with terror. They had him, this time; there was not the least doubt of it. And they had led him there by the nose into the bargain.

Twenty minutes passed, and Jones concluded it was time for him to act. He went forward to try the door, but this time it was locked. Jones, however, was not without resource. The house next door was vacant, and he found a way into this, finally reaching the roof. From this he jumped to the other roof, found the scuttle open, and crept down the stairs, flight after flight, till the whirl of a motor arrested him.

Conspirators are often overcautious, too. So intent were the rascals upon the business at hand that they did not notice the door open slowly. It did not take the butler more than a moment to realize that his friend and any was near certain death. With an oath he sprang into the room, gave Braine a push which sent him down to join the victim, and pitched into the other two. It was a battle-royal while it lasted. Jones knocked down one of them, yelled to Norton, and kicked the rope he saw down into the pit. One end of this rope was attached to a ring in the wall. And up this rope Norton swarmed after he had disposed of Braine. The tide of battle then swung about in favor of the butler, and shortly the fake reporter and his



Up This Rope Norton Swarmed.

companion were made to join their chief.

Jones stopped the machinery. He could not bring himself to let his enemies die so horribly. Here he knew he would regret this sentiment.

When the people came, summoned by some outsider who had heard the racket of the conflict, there was no one to be found in the pit. Nor was there any visible sign of an exit.

There was one, however, built against such an hour and known only to the chiefs of the Black Hundred.

And still the golden tinted bank notes reposed tranquilly in their hiding place!

(Continued Next Saturday.)

## PETROGRAD SUFFERS FROM WATER FAMINE

(Associated Press Correspondence.) Petrograd, Dec. 11.—The city's recent experience in doing without water, as a result of the blocking of the Neva estuary by ice, has renewed agitation for the aqueduct system of pure water from Ladoga lake. The Prince of Oldenburg has been appointed chairman of a commission to examine into the whole question.

The present system is the clearest of the river water by means of an ozonizing process, which was recommended and installed by German experts, and has several times been condemned as inadequate and unsafe by British engineers. The latter hold the water responsible for a long series of epidemics.

The effect of the total failure of the water supply of a city of over a million people, can hardly be described. For several days, during the blockade of the estuary, inhabitants of all classes and conditions, with every species of race, sex, and age, were seen trooping down to the rivers and canals to get enough water for the preparation of their meals.

The Prussian government has decided to make any allowance to cap-

## STOMACH TROUBLES

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Madison Heights, Va.—Mr. Chas. A. Ragland, of this place, writes: "I have been suffering from the Black Drought for indigestion, and other stomach troubles, also colds, and find it to be the very best medicine I have ever used."

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